INTRODUCTION

If it had been about opening a ketchup factory or the spa that people have been going on about for ages, there might have been something to say for the fuss, but that Homeric business was just nonsense.

Ismail Kadare, *The File on H*[1]

In Ismail Kadare's novel *The File on H*, two American classicists arrive in Albania in the early 1930s and set out to record the ancient Albanian traditions still performed by illiterate bards. In their journey, they are confronted with two different Albanias: on the one hand, the dignified and hospitable world of the highland bards; on the other, the petty provincial elite who are convinced that the Americans are spies. The latter group proceed to use all their subtle and suspicious intelligence to try and catch the supposed spies *in flagrante*, consistently misunderstanding their notes on Homer as encoded reports on their subversive activities. As well as a metaphor for Albania, Kadare's novel is an education for the modern classicist.[2] While the highland Albanians may well remind us of their beautiful and neglected epic tradition, back in the provincial capital the petty bureaucrats with European aspirations have their own lesson to teach. For them, an interest in Homer is not just peculiar, but altogether incomprehensible. Their failure to understand the aims of the two Americans highlights a phenomenon that is usually taken for granted in the field of classics: the enormous and lasting authority of Homer in the Western world.[3]

[1] Kadare (1997) 163. Unfortunately, I was unable to trace the original *Dosja H*.

[2] The canon of western literature and Homer in particular are important themes in Kadare's work as a writer and critic. See especially Kadare (1991).

[3] Burkert (1987) 43 is a rare example of a classicist who manifests surprise at the authority of Homer: 'Hardly less surprising is the success of Homer among the Greeks, a dashing and lasting success that is not a necessary or natural consequence of either age or quality: age is liable to go out of fashion, and quality is always debatable.'

This authority is in some ways harder to understand than that of the Bible, because it is not transcendentally guaranteed: already in the sixth century, Xenophanes calls epic poetry 'fictions', 'creations of his predecessors', πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων, not 'word of God'.[4] We may thus ask ourselves how the Homeric poems acquired and maintained their authority and influence. A related question is how their author, Homer, is linked to that authority. Again, a comparison with other influential texts may alert us to the fact that an author is not necessary in order to establish the authority of a text: many influential epics were handed down anonymously.[5] This book stems from a sense of surprise and wonder at the lasting influence of the Homeric poems and at the resonance of their author's name: Homer.

While I hope that this sense of wonder is never entirely lost in the course of the detailed discussions presented here, it is also true that it does not in itself constitute a viable starting point for these discussions. As Said rightly, and somewhat reassuringly, points out, 'there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to *enable* what follows from them'.[6] Three issues need to be addressed at the outset of this project: the assumptions which underlie my approach, the scope of the book, and the organisation of the material discussed.

The overall approach

The basic idea underlying this book is simple, no matter how difficult its application in specific cases. I maintain that ancient (and, indeed, modern) discussions of the figure of Homer can be seen as

[4] Xenophanes fr. 1.22 DK.

[5] With characteristic perceptiveness, Burkert draws attention to this detail in (1972) 75. I translate: 'The Gilgamesh epic was a great literary success for hundreds of years. It was copied and translated again and again – perhaps it even influenced the Homeric epics. Yet during all that time and among all those peoples, nobody seems to have asked who the author of this work was, although it was carefully crafted and, in its own way, a great literary achievement. Likewise, there are no individual authors of Hittite and Ugaritic epics, or in the Old Testament.'

[6] Said (1995) 16, summarising Said (1975), where he analyses, among other things, the relationship between beginnings and the institutions of knowledge.

testimonies to the significance and meaning of the Homeric poems for specific audiences. In recent years, the ancient biographical traditions about the Greek poets have been closely scrutinised with the aim of exposing their unreliability as historical documents. For example, at the beginning of *The Lives of the Greek Poets*, Mary Lefkowitz describes her aim as that of establishing the fictionality of the ancient biographical traditions and using it as a basis for dismissing them from the study of literature: 'If this book can establish that these stories can be disregarded as popular fiction, some literary history will need to be re-written, so that it starts not with the poets' biographies, but with the poems themselves.'[7] My main contention is that the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer's life does not warrant our 'disregard'. Precisely because they are fictional, early speculations about the author of the Homeric poems must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences. For this reason they constitute evidence concerning the reception of the Homeric poems at a time in which their reputation was still in the making.[8]

Scope

This brings me to my second point: the scope of the present work. In the extremely long history of representations of Homer, I have privileged two phases: the earliest portrayals of Homer available to us and – to a much lesser extent – modern academic representations of the poet. There are three main reasons why I focus on the period spanning the sixth to the fourth century BC. In the first place, the earliest extant representations of Homer are extremely influential: it is to our archaic and classical sources that we ultimately owe our acquaintance with the name 'Homer' and the figure of the authoritative poet whom it denotes. The importance of the

[7] Lefkowitz (1981) x.

[8] To an extent, Vitali (1990) and West (1999) share my approach, in that they investigate how ancient fictional narratives about Homer can be history for us. Yet I do not think either article fully exploits the potential of ancient depictions of Homer. Vitali (1990) tries to use the *Lives of Homer* to investigate a typically modern concern: whether Homer could write. West (1999) tries to circumscribe the invention of Homer to a particular time and place: sixth-century Athens. By contrast, I argue that it is a Panhellenic phenomenon linked to rhapsodic performances throughout the Greek world.

early definitions of this figure for the subsequent reception of the Homeric poems is paramount. For example, while in the sixth century he was presented as the author of a vast number of works: *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Hymns*, Cyclic poems, *Margites*, *Oechaliae Halosis* and other poems besides, by the fourth century his oeuvre had been narrowed down to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, because they are considered the best poems.[9] In this case as in many others, early discussions of the name Homer reflect important stages in the reception of epic.

A second reason why I focus on the archaic and classical periods is linked to the performance of the Homeric poems. One of the main contentions of this work is that, at a time in which oral performance is the dominant mode for the communication of epic, reflections about the poems do not focus on written texts but on people: those who perform the poems, those who listen to them and, most importantly for this project, the absent poet or 'maker' (ποιητής) whose poems are being performed. Much work has been done in order to develop a flexible model of 'text' which can be employed in contexts where poetry is performed and experienced orally;[10] my work can be seen as an attempt to explore the concept of 'authorship' in that same context.

A third and final reason why I focus on pre-Hellenistic representations of Homer is that there exists as yet no full study of the early and classical reception of the Homeric poems, whereas Hellenistic and later approaches to Homer have been better studied and understood.[11] It is often assumed that this is because the evidence

[9] The gradual restriction of the name Homer to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* seems to parallel the increasing propensity, in the course of the archaic period, to represent Iliadic and Odyssean episodes on vases. A number of scholars have discussed and tried to explain why before the sixth century scenes from epics other than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are as frequent as episodes found in those two poems. However, none of these scholars relates the issue to the use of the name Homer in the archaic and classical period: see Friis Johansen (1967), esp. 223–30; Kannicht (1982); R. Cook (1983); Brillante (1983); Shapiro (1989) 43–7; Scaife (1995); Snodgrass (1997) and (1998). In this book, I do not discuss the relationship between epic texts and epic scenes on vases, partly because my main topic is the poet Homer and there is no portrait of Homer on a vase, and partly because the methodological problems posed by discussing the relationship between the Homeric poems and Greek vases seem to me even greater than is usually acknowledged.

[10] For example, Jensen (1980); Gentili (1988); Nagy (1996b); Bakker (1993) and (1997).

[11] On the Hellenistic reception of Homer, see, for example, Montanari (1979–95), with further bibliography.

for Hellenistic and later responses to the Homeric poems is more abundant, detailed and reliable than that for the archaic and classical period. While this is true, it hardly constitutes an explanation, since many aspects of the archaic and classical world are intensely studied, no matter how much better the evidence for later periods may be. The problem rather lies with the models that have been used to study the reception of epic or, indeed, ancient literary criticism at large: scholars focus on responses to written texts, rather than on the construction of authors.[12] As long as one looks for discussions of specific Homeric passages or sustained interpretations of the texts, the pre-Hellenistic evidence for the reception of Homer is indeed scant and hardly allows far-reaching conclusions. By contrast, I argue that discussions of the poet Homer represent a rich and nuanced body of evidence for the early reception of epic.

In a study of the constructions and representations of Homer from the sixth to the fourth century, Plato deserves a place of honour, not only because he is an important source for the period, but also because his views about Homer proved to be extremely influential. Plato's discussion of Homer is an important and difficult subject which has attracted the attention of philosophers and classicists through the centuries.[13] The present book does not tackle the issue of Plato's relationship with Homer in its entirety, but rather focuses on an aspect of it which has received little attention. The absence of an overall study of the reception of Homer in the fifth and fourth century fosters the tendency to discuss Plato's views in isolation, without uncovering connections between his portrayal of Homer and those found in earlier and contemporary sources. Plato himself, of course, emphasises his own isolation as a critic of Homer, yet a patient reconstruction of early and classical representations of Homer can help to uncover the ways in which

[12] On the ancient reception of Homer, see, for example, Labarbe (1949); Buffière (1956); N. Richardson (1975); Clarke (1981); Lamberton (1986); Lamberton and Keaney (1992); N. Richardson (1993) 25–49; Sanz Morales (1994). On ancient literary criticism: Atkins (1934); Lanata (1963); Grube (1965); Pfeiffer (1968); Russell and Winterbottom (1972); Russell (1981); Too (1998); A. Ford (forthcoming). All these studies focus on responses to texts.

[13] For discussions of Plato's relationship to Homer and other poets see, for example, Tigerstedt (1969); Murdoch (1977); Gadamer (1980) 39–72; for further bibliography, see Kraut (1992) 509–10 and P. Murray (1996) 239–45.

Plato draws on this wider tradition. For this reason, I emphasise the connections between Plato's portrayal of Homer and other representations, even when Plato himself does his best to dissimulate such connections.

Apart from sixth- to fourth-century constructions of Homer, I also devote some space to modern academic representations of the poet, focusing in particular on two debates: the so-called Homeric Question, and the role of authorship in the study of texts. The traditional formulation of the Homeric Question is based on the assumption that we may discover real, historical authors from reading their texts, an assumption that is closer to the approach to Homer adopted by Alexandrian scholars than to archaic and classical conceptions of the poet.[14] Accordingly, classicists have tended to privilege the Alexandrian conception of Homer, as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* alone, and as the criterion for establishing the only correct text of those poems. By focusing on the earlier representations of Homer, I hope to show that the modern formulation of the Homeric Question is based on a conception of Homer very different indeed from that of our early sources: in those sources, Homer is the object of invention, not of discovery.

In looking for different models of authorship from those envisaged by traditional formulations of the Homeric Question, this book aims to contribute to a recent debate about the role of authors in the understanding of literature. The concept of authorship has come under close scrutiny in recent years: an increasing pessimism about the possibility and usefulness of discovering authorial intentions behind texts has led critics to view authors as features of the text itself, rather than as transcendental authorities which determine its meaning. In the field of classics, this has led scholars to study the ways in which certain texts (usually canonical ones such as the *Odyssey* or the plays of Aristophanes) point to the figure of the absent author.[15] This book relies on such studies, but focuses mainly on the figure of the poet Homer outside the texts attributed to him. In the case of Homer, it is particularly obvious

[14] On the Alexandrian quest for the 'real Homer', see Nagy (1996b) ch. 5.

[15] For example, Goldhill (1991). For further references see p. 18 n. 16, and p. 55 nn. 9 and 10.

that a broader range of texts is needed in order to respond to Foucault's encouragement to investigate 'how the figure of the author became individualized'.[16]

In attempting to strike a balance between a detailed discussion of archaic and classical constructions of Homer on the one hand, and the broader implications of my work on the other, I privilege the study of ancient sources: this choice deserves some explanation. Certainly, the focus of my work could be broader. For example, the idea of looking at ancient biographies of authors as evidence for the reception of their work could be extended to other Greek and Roman poets and prose writers. Indeed, it seems to me that all representations of authors, ancient and modern, result from the impact of their work on a particular set of readers, listeners or viewers. So, the approach I propose here could potentially be extended to a very large selection of authors and readers. It could also be used to study how views about Homer and his work changed from the sixth century to the present day. For example, it would be possible to investigate how Wilamowitz's approach to writing Homer's life reflects the intellectual and social context in which he wrote. I explore some of the directions in which the present work could be extended in the Conclusion. By and large, however, I focus on the invention of Homer in the archaic and classical period for at least three reasons.

In the first place, Homer is eminently suited to the approach I propose. Because there is almost no documentation about the composition of the Homeric poems, other than what can be deduced from the poems themselves, there are very few constraints on what can be said about Homer. In other words, a description of Homer is the very direct expression of a particular interpretation of the poems. In the case of William Shakespeare or Thomas Mann, it is possible to speak of a feminine side to their writing, but it cannot simply be stated that they were women.[17] In the case of Homer, even that has been suggested: Samuel Butler famously argued that the author of the *Odyssey* was a woman.[18]

[16] Foucault (1979) 141.

[17] On the 'man-womanly' mind of Shakespeare and on the androgynous nature of writing, see Woolf (1929).

[18] Butler (1897).

The second reason for my choice of topic is that Homer is an extremely influential author, and that classical Greece has been held up as an ideal. In recent years, the Western canon of great literature has been challenged in various ways. Critics have turned their attention to uncanonical texts, and have attempted to read the canon 'against the grain'.[19] Yet it seems to me that these are not the only possible strategies that can be used to challenge dominant ways of thinking. The texts on which I base my discussion belong not only to classical literature but, often, to the most canonical period within classics. Moreover, I do not consciously read these sources 'against the grain': on the contrary, I try very hard to understand what the Greeks wanted to say about Homer, not what they tried to hide or failed to understand. Yet, paradoxically, archaic and classical views about Homer seem to me to challenge some claims about Homer and the Homeric poems which are by now considered canonical.

A third and related reason for my specific focus is that a study grounded in one particular area can, paradoxically, be more illuminating for other fields of enquiry than an attempt to study simultaneously a very broad spectrum of contexts and phenomena. The anthropologist Marilyn Strathern makes a similar observation when discussing the concept of 'transferable skills'. She observes that anthropological fieldworkers who successfully embed themselves in a particular site are more likely, not less, to be able to do so in a different site in the future. At the same time, they would find it difficult to immerse themselves in the life and organisation of a particular community, if they were constantly thinking about how they might do it somewhere else.[20] The archaic and classical representations of Homer discussed in this book constitute a small proportion of what can be said about Homer, let alone about other poets and artists, yet they clearly show how authors can themselves be objects of creative processes.

I should add here that, while in theory it is possible to isolate the archaic and classical periods from Alexandrian and later times as I have suggested, in practice such a neat distinction cannot be

[19] See, for example, Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) or Spivak (1993).
[20] Strathern (1997) 124f.

maintained. As Dougherty and Kurke point out at the beginning of their study in cultural poetics,[21] any scholar working on the archaic period must rely on later sources and judge to what extent they may reflect earlier views. I have thus used Hellenistic and later sources when I thought that they helped to illuminate archaic and classical representations of Homer. I use 'illuminate' in a broad sense: I have referred to late sources when I believe they illustrate certain patterns that can already be detected in the archaic and classical periods.[22] For example, the idea that Homer was a Roman is not one that would have occurred to a fifth-century audience; but the possibility of adding a new hypothesis about Homer's place of origin is embedded in the earliest controversies about his birth. In other words, later portrayals of Homer can be used to illuminate the logic of earlier representations: the archaic and classical discussions open up certain possibilities that are often taken up, developed, and modified in later tradition.[23] In short, while I do use some late sources, I do so only when they relate to issues which were important in the early period: for example, Homer's blindness or his poverty. In this respect, my bias towards early representations of Homer is obvious: I do not include chapters on portrayals of Homer which become important after the classical period, such as 'Homer the natural scientist' or 'Homer the scribe'.

The late collections of biographical material usually known as the *Lives of Homer* seem to me to encourage my approach. Unlike the biographies of other poets and famous personalities, they emphasise the lack of a coherent, unified and self-consistent version of Homer's life. Rather than presenting us with a continuous narrative, they tend to focus on relatively few specific aspects of the life of Homer, and list a series of contradictory opinions about them, opinions which typically span several centuries. While these texts do not follow recognisable ancient conventions about the writing of

[21] Dougherty and Kurke (1993), Introduction.

[22] Cf. Dougherty and Kurke (1993) 6: 'There is some justification for mining later sources (as we must, given the exiguousness of actual archaic evidence) if we can identify metaphors or systems of signification that correspond to archaic ones.'

[23] In this respect, my approach can perhaps be compared to that adopted by students of myth. Buxton (1994) offers a useful introduction to approaches to myth as a 'language' with certain rules and sets of possibilities.

biography, they display remarkable similarities with one another.[24] The *Vita Herodotea* is the only *Life* which tries to refute, rather than list, contradictory views about Homer: yet its refutations actually show how easily Homer's life breaks down into a series of debates and contrasting opinions. In short, by listing earlier opinions and refusing to incorporate them into a coherent whole, the *Lives of Homer* encourage, or at any rate allow, my selective focus on sixth- to fourth-century debates.

Structure

The emphasis on specific aspects of Homer's biography in the *Lives of Homer* leads me to the third and last issue that needs to be addressed here: the structure of the book and the organisation of the material discussed. Those scholars who have discussed the pre-Alexandrian reception of Homer have tended to organise their material according to the sources which treat Homer. Thus Mehmel, for example, has individual sections on, among others, Hesiod, Xenophanes and Herodotus.[25] By contrast, this book begins with a discussion of the origins of the legend of Homer and the contexts in which it flourished (ch. 1), and continues by focusing on particular aspects of Homer's life which lie at the heart of archaic and classical representations of the poet: his birthplace and genealogy (ch. 2); his date (ch. 3); his blindness, poverty and closeness to the gods (ch. 4); his relationship with other poets (ch. 5); and his legacy to his descendants and followers (ch. 6). There are various reasons why I believe that this thematic organisation is preferable to that which isolates specific sources.

First, I deliberately allow Homer's life to shape my work, proceeding from his birth (chs. 2–3), through his adult life (chs. 4 and 5), to his legacy (ch. 6). In doing so, I wish to pay homage to ancient biographical modes of thinking about Homer. A second and related point is that this mode of presentation draws attention to the ways in which debates about particular aspects of Homer's life straddle many different texts and visual representations. All our

[24] For the development of Greek biography, see Momigliano (1993).
[25] Mehmel (1954).

ancient sources, whether they self-consciously present themselves as relating to a wider debate or not, need to be read in conjunction with related representations of Homer, in order for us to understand their particular contribution.

This organisation of the material has the further advantage that it helps to break down traditional distinctions between canonical texts and their 'backgrounds', and emphasises how the same text, for example the description of the blind poet in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, can relate simultaneously to different discourses: the tension between local and Panhellenic poetry (ch. 2), between anonymity and fame (ch. 4), between present and future (ch. 6).[26] Since very different sources are discussed in the same chapter and, conversely, the same passage is sometimes discussed in different chapters, a number of cross-references are supplied. Readers may also find it useful to consult the index of passages.

The biographical approach I adopt is also intended to emphasise the fact that each aspect of the life of Homer raises a particular set of problems and concerns. For example: discussions about his birth explore the tension between Homer's status as the Panhellenic author *par excellence*, and his relationship to specific audiences or groups of rhapsodes who are linked to particular places in Greece (ch. 2). Debates about Homer's date tend to explore whether he was a direct witness to the Trojan War or sang about a remote past (ch. 3). Representations of his blindness focus on Homer as the privileged prophet and/or as the disempowered beggar (ch. 4). Apart from blindness, Homer's relationship to other poets is also used to define what kind of poet he is (ch. 5). Stories about Homer's heirs tend to explain in biographical terms the relationship between the rhapsodes and the poet; and also the transition from oral performance to written text (ch. 6). In their totality, these discussions shed light on the early reception of Homeric epic, in that they show how inventing the poet constituted a powerful means of thinking about the poems.

Since the resonance of Homer's name is perceived, however indirectly, by a vast number of people, this book aims to be as accessible

[26] The refusal to distinguish between privileged texts and their contexts, and the possible coincidence of different discourses within the same text or even anecdote, are both emphasised by New Historicists; see Montrose (1992).

as possible. At the same time, it tries to do justice to what the Greeks had to say about Homer, even when their thoughts seem obscure or fragmentary to us. This balance between faithfulness and accessibility is difficult to strike, and I have often opted for an inclusive approach. I quote ancient sources in the original, but also provide translations into English. I offer my own renderings rather than relying on more elegant translations, because I try to capture the features of the original most relevant to the discussion at hand. Throughout the book, I refer to Allen's edition of the *Lives of Homer* because it is the most easily accessible, but quote Wilamowitz's text when a specific argument depends on it.[27] I am aware that the attempt to balance accessibility and rigour sometimes leads to unwieldy, repetitive sentences and to inconsistencies: for example, the use of both English and Latin for titles of works. *Lives* is immediately clear, *Vitae* evokes the long tradition which developed out of the invention of Homer.

[27] Wilamowitz (1916a); Allen is quoted in the list of abbreviations.

CONCLUSION

Actually, Homer was not written by Homer but by another man of that name.
School essay[1]

This book focuses on the earliest portrayals of Homer available to us and, to a lesser extent, on modern academic representations of the poet. While ancient views about Homer have been considered at length, modern approaches have been discussed only in relation to the subject matter of individual chapters: in effect, they have been used as introductions to the ancient debates. The treatment of modern views within different chapters entails that the connections between them have been left implicit. In the Conclusion, therefore, I endeavour to identify some common strands in contemporary approaches to Homer. I then proceed to place my work within a larger scholarly framework by exploring how it relates not only to other discussions of Homer, but also to broader approaches to reception.

A second and related purpose of this Conclusion is to outline some of the directions in which the overall approach proposed in this book can be extended. The invention of Homer is, potentially, a vast subject. It would be possible, and fruitful, to look at the ways in which Homer was re-invented in later times and different places; and there are other ways in which the discussions presented here could be developed. I have suggested in the Introduction that embedding a study in a particular time and culture, for example archaic and classical Greece, can reveal specific views and ideas which can then be used to illuminate concepts

[1] The history of this note is intriguing. I first came across it in an e-mail listing amusing passages from GCSE essays in Classical Civilization. However, Mark Twain attributes a similar quote to a schoolboy in 'English as she is taught'. *Century Magazine* 33 (April 1887)

developed in other cultural contexts. Precisely because ancient stories about Homer were developed in contexts very different from those of modern academic debates, they can be used to explore the assumptions and limits of current views about authorship and authority.

Reality and representation

A central issue for any discussion of the poet Homer is the relationship between reality and representation. A related question is whether an approach which focuses on historical fact is necessarily more illuminating than one which privileges the imagination. In this book, I have focused on how the ancient Greeks imagined Homer and have deliberately failed to discuss whether their representations were true to the 'real' poet(s) of the *Iliad* (and the *Odyssey*). Instead, I have suggested that ancient depictions of Homer can be history for us in that they express how ancient audiences received the Homeric poems. In the case of Homer, any attempt to assess the truthfulness of ancient representations threatens to obscure the meaning and significance of ancient views, rather than enhance our understanding of them. This is because the concept of 'the real Homer' is highly problematic. Just like ancient audiences, modern scholars too must reconstruct him (if they choose to reconstruct him at all) from a reading of the poems, or parts of poems, which they decide to attribute to him. The danger, therefore, is that one assesses the 'reliability' and even 'usefulness' or 'worth' of the ancient representations of Homer solely by establishing to what degree they conform to modern ones. We see, for example, that scholars like Wade-Gery, Kirk and Lloyd praise Herodotus because his date for Homer is close to the one they favour, the eighth century.[2] These scholars, however, fail to investigate the reasons why Herodotus dates Homer 400 years before himself: such an investigation would improve our understanding of Herodotus and of the reception of Homer, but would show that Herodotus' agreement with modern scholars is entirely coincidental.

[2] Wade-Gery (1952) 25–7; Kirk (1962) 286; Lloyd (1989) *ad* 53.4; cf. p. 112 n. 57.

The tendency to draw sharp distinctions between the true or plausible and the fictional or imaginary, and to value only what falls under the first category, is not limited to sporadic modern studies, such as those concerning Herodotus' date for Homer. In fact, the difficulties created by a rigid distinction between reality and representation pervade modern approaches to the figure of Homer at large, and have had to be confronted in every chapter.

At the beginning of this book, when discussing ancient representations of rhapsodes, I pointed out that the modern use of the term 'rhapsode' is based not on ancient descriptions of the rhapsodes' activities but on what modern scholars think that those activities actually entailed. Thus they are thought of as minor and late composers in the Homeric tradition rather than as performers of works which (truthfully or not) they attribute to others. The ancient distinction between rhapsodes (performers) and poets (makers), which is crucial to this book, has therefore been obscured.

In chapter 2, I have mentioned the example of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, where, contrary to standard practice, the existence of Homer on Chios in the eighth or seventh century is supported not by ancient *testimonia* but by Witte's and Lesky's entries for Homer in the *Real-Encyclopädie*.[3] While Greek views are dismissed as unreliable, modern conjectures about the actual composition of the Homeric poems are used in order to establish who Homer really was. There are also less obvious and therefore potentially more confusing examples in which scholars privilege reality over representation: even Jacoby's careful and respectful analysis of what the ancient traditions say about Homer's place of origin is motivated by the desire to find out from where 'the real Homer' came.[4]

As the argument in chapter 3 suggests, recent discussions of the ancient dates of Homer have proved to be guided either by a predetermined judgement about what the right date may be, or by the desire to assess ancient chronologies with a view to using them as a basis for a true chronology of Greek history. Few modern readers have paid attention to the tendency, on the part of ancient

[3] Fraser and Matthews (1987–97) vol. 1, *sub voce* Ὅμηρος, discussed at p. 53.
[4] Jacoby (1933a).

sources, to list a number of mutually exclusive dates for Homer without adjudicating between them.

The modern focus on truth is perhaps most striking in relation to the topics treated in chapter 4. Even in the case of Homer's blindness, where its symbolic significance might be thought to strike any reader, discussions have in fact focused on the question whether 'the real Homer' was blind or not. When assessing the plausibility of the *Vita Herodotea* as a document about Homer's life, Lefkowitz, for example, complains: 'But "Herodotus" does not try to explain in any serious way how the blind poet was able to compose so great an oeuvre.'[5] This statement is remarkable not only because it suggests that blind people are unlikely to compose 'great' poetry, but also because it insists on a literal, 'realistic', reading of Homer's lack of sight. A study of Homer's blindness along the lines suggested, for example, by those who discuss blind characters in Greek tragedy has not previously been attempted. The reason is simple: Homer, unlike Oedipus, is thought to be a real, historical person; consequently, his blindness is not approached as a powerful symbol, but rather as a physical disability which may or may not be a practical impediment to the composition of the Homeric poems.

In chapter 5, I suggest that the archaic and classical conception of Homer as the author of poems other than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has not only been dismissed, but sometimes even ignored. More radically still, a passage that was considered most Homeric in fifth-century Athens, *Iliad* 13.126–33, is athetised by some modern editors.[6] These discrepancies between ancient representations of Homer and modern suppositions about what the poet really composed often lead to false assumptions about the ancient reception of epic: for example, seventh-century artists who engaged with the cyclic poems did not, thereby, 'turn their back on Homer', since those poems too were considered Homeric at the time.[7]

In chapter 6, I have argued that stories about Homer's heirs tend to be approached by modern scholars as evidence for the textual transmission of the Homeric poems. In their attempts to

[5] Lefkowitz (1981) 23. [6] See pp. 175f. [7] Snodgrass (1998) ix.

reconstruct a history of the Homeric texts, scholars often fail to notice that references to copies of the poems make a very late appearance down the line of Homer's heirs. Pre-hellenistic stories about the Homeridae and the lawgivers 'who take the poems to their cities' focus on rhapsodic performances, not written texts. I do not wish to query the modern understanding of what 'really happened': copies of the Homeric poems must indeed have existed in the archaic and classical periods. What remains open to question, however, is their importance in the reception of the poems. If, down to the fourth century, sources fail to pay attention to written texts of the Homeric poems, and rather look at the poet, his heirs and his audiences, we may wonder whether modern scholars should, by contrast, privilege texts over rhapsodes when studying the reception of Homer in the fifth century.

This summary shows that, whereas the present book focuses on ancient views about Homer without trying to assess their reliability, the overwhelming preoccupation of other scholars in the field is to investigate the reality of Homeric composition beyond those representations. At the heart of this difference of approach lie two main preoccupations. The first concerns the relative merits of representation as opposed to reality. The second and more fundamental problem concerns the very possibility of drawing sharp distinctions between the two.

At the beginning of his *Essay on Laughter*, Giambattista Vico claimed that it would be absurd to oppose truth to the human faculty for invention: philosophy, geometry and all the other human disciplines, Vico claims, warn us against drawing such a distinction.[8] Unsurprisingly, Vico's philosophy has recently attracted the attention of scholars interested in representation. Among these we find, for example, Edward Said, who describes the lesson imparted by the Neapolitan philosopher in the following terms: 'But as Vico himself said, just because a belief is fantastic to us now does not mean that that belief did not serve some valid purpose for the mind that created it and held it: this is the most insistent lesson of his historiography.'[9] So, one of the reasons why a focus on representation may be commendable is that it

[8] Vico (1953) 926. [9] Said (1975) 361

contributes to our understanding of the culture or 'mind', as Said puts it, which created it.

Modern theories about who Homer was, and what he really composed, lie at the heart of classical scholarship, even though ancient representations would sometimes be more instructive. I have already pointed out that archaic views about Homer's oeuvre affect our understanding of early Greek art: the popularity of the epic Cycle in the seventh century does not indicate a deliberate refusal to engage with Homer, since the Cycle too was Homeric. Rather, the increasing popularity of Iliadic and Odyssean scenes on vases, in combination with the progressively more restricted use of Homer's name, shows that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* acquired their prominence in the course of the archaic and classical periods.

Ancient representations of Homer are also relevant to the interpretation of Athenian drama. Scholars are quick to emphasise the differences between Homeric single combat and the phalanx, and claim that, whereas Homer privileges the hero, Athenian drama celebrates communal fighting. The present study makes no contribution to the *Realien* of military tactics: it is indeed true that most Homeric battle scenes focus on single combat. Yet the contribution of those *Realien* to the reception of the Homeric poems needs to be assessed: since the Athenians presented Homer as the teacher of hoplite fighting, it becomes difficult to claim that, for fifth-century audiences, the Homeric poems and tragedy presented 'contrasting ideals of military involvement'.[10] By privileging certain aspects of Homer as opposed to others, it was possible to view the military ideals of tragedy as identical with those of epic.

Early images of Homer can also contribute to the study of ancient literary criticism. In looking for the antecedents of modern critical practices, scholars have rightly focused on the intellectual elite who possessed written copies of literary works.[11] Before the Hellenistic period, however, Homer himself is never represented as writing or handling texts: he travels, composes his poems without recourse to writing and subsequently performs them as a rhapsode

[10] Goldhill (1986) 144.

[11] See Atkins (1934); Grube (1965); Pfeiffer (1968); Harriott (1969); Russell and Winterbottom (1972); Russell (1981); Too (1998); Greenwood (2000).

might do.[12] Those who imagined Homer clearly had little interest in texts. Rather than basing their criticism on the written word, they expressed views about Homeric poetry by inventing its author. At a popular level, the invention of Homer, as opposed to the circulation of written copies, is a central phenomenon for the reception of epic.

The circumscribed observations made here are meant to illustrate a more general point. Just as Homeric commentaries are important sources for the way in which Apollonius and Virgil read Homer, so archaic and classical representations of the poet can be related to several different aspects of ancient Greek literature and culture.[13] For example, it would be possible to compare the archaic image of Homer as an itinerant wise poet with representations of other travelling sages; or one could link Herodotus' and the Sophists' discoveries of 'hidden meanings' in the Homeric poems with the general emphasis on expertise and professional teaching typical of the Greek enlightenment.

Given that ancient representations of Homer can be related to several aspects of the classical world, it is perhaps surprising that they have received so little attention in comparison with modern speculations about who Homer may 'really' have been. It may be supposed that the privileging of fact over fiction is a well established phenomenon in all areas of classics; and that, conversely, the interest in representation is relatively new. In fact, neither supposition is true. Greek mythology, for example, is intensely studied, although it is thought to belong to the realm of representation, not historical reality. Books like *Imaginary Greece* attempt to uncover the logic of myth without trying to establish whether, say, the myth of the Minotaur in the labyrinth actually reflects some historical truth about Cretan palaces.[14] Representations of Homer, by contrast, are scrutinised with the hope of getting at the truth: in comparison with other aspects of the Greek imagination, they have fared particularly badly. Nietzsche already observed this in *Wir Philologen* when, in denouncing the gulf between the Greeks

[12] See Vitali (1990).

[13] Montanari (1998b) 17 argues for the usefulness of ancient commentaries on Homer for those who study Hellenistic and Roman epic.

[14] Buxton (1994).

and the classicists, he gave the following example: 'How classicists torment themselves asking whether Homer wrote, without grasping the much more important principle that Greek art exhibits a long inward hostility to writing and did not want to be read!'[15] Despite Nietzsche's protest, scholars have continued to privilege modern speculations about the reality of Homeric composition over ancient views about the poet and the poems.

The reasons why ancient accounts of myth have fared much better than representations of Homer are, in fact, quite simple. Myth is even more obviously a matter of invention to us than it was to the Greeks. Not so with Homer: the current assumption is that authors' lives are facts used to explain the fiction, and not themselves the object of fabrication. In other words, modern notions about what is an appropriate subject of invention (for example, myth) and what is not (for example, the date of an author) entirely determine current approaches. It may be asked, however, on what grounds and with what authority modern critics determine what should and should not be invented. This question leads me to the second fundamental issue which needs to be addressed here: the possibility of drawing sharp distinctions between reality and representation.

As long as reality and representation are kept strictly apart, it is possible to construct hierarchies of competing representations by establishing which ones are closer to the truth. Thus new scientific theories replace old ones because it is believed that they provide better models for the workings of the physical world. In Homeric studies, scholars sometimes present their work in ways which resemble those of scientific enquiry. Consider the following claims by Latacz: 'It is clear that the inventors of the legend [of Homer] had as little authentic information about *the historical Homer* as we do [. . .]. The *image* substituted for the *reality* takes its complexion from (1) the epics themselves and (2) the circumstances of a singer's life in the contemporary world. The latter were completely unsuitable. The former were much more appropriate in themselves, but, *in their day*, the inventors of the legend *lacked the*

[15] Translation by Arrowsmith (1963) 15.

means and method to interpret them adequately.'[16] As my italics suggest, the language of scientific rigour is intimately connected with the distinction between reality and representation. In certain circumstances, however, this distinction becomes problematic.

The relationship between representation and reality, or the 'signifier' and the 'signified', to borrow two terms from linguistics, has been intensely studied by scholars in a vast number of disciplines. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is perhaps sufficient to consider an example from the visual arts. It has been noted that, since art affects the ways in which reality is perceived, image and prototype tend to merge.[17] In other words, the process of establishing how close an image is to reality depends on the viewer's perception of reality in the first place, and that perception is affected by dominant images.[18] Returning to Homer, the definition of the reality behind ancient representations tends to be affected by dominant images of authors in modern culture. Latacz, we have seen, simply assumes the existence of 'a historical Homer' and the importance of his travels and education; he then goes on to claim that he is in a better position to describe this person than his early biographers.

Now, investigating the realities which made possible the composition of the Homeric poems is not, in itself, an objectionable aim. On the contrary: it is possible to identify some events or processes which must have taken place (for example: the development of the epic tradition and the writing down of the Homeric poems), and then proceed to investigate them. Various theories about historical reality can be put forward and then assessed by discussing how well they fit the testimony of the Homeric poems. However, if this is done, it is good practice to scrutinise one's assumptions and reduce to a minimum what is taken for granted.[19] It is in this respect

[16] Latacz (1996) 291.

[17] For an interesting discussion of the fusion of representation and the prototype, see Freedberg (1989), especially ch. 15.

[18] See, for example, Baudrillard (1983) 151: 'Art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality.'

[19] Some scholars succeed admirably in starting from modest and explicit assumptions when investigating the composition of the Homeric poems. I find Foley (1999) particularly impressive in his attempt 'to take things from the beginning' (xvi), and show how an understanding of Homeric composition affects the interpretation of the poems.

that ancient images of Homer may contribute to modern theories about the composition of the poems. They show that certain assumptions are not necessary in order to appreciate the Homeric poems: there is no need, for example, to establish once and for all from where the poet came or where he lived; in fact, in antiquity it seemed desirable to keep inventing new possibilities. Similarly, it was not necessary to link Homer's authority to political power: he could be imagined as a blind beggar without in any way demeaning his poetry. In the next two sections I endeavour to show some of the ways in which ancient representations of Homer can help to expose modern assumptions about authorship and authority.

Authorship

So far, I have briefly indicated some of the ways in which this book may relate to other studies of archaic and classical culture; and have then suggested that it may also contribute to other areas of scholarship by exposing some differences between the early representations of Homer and their later appropriations. These differences can be used to investigate ancient and modern approaches to Homer, and can also be related, more generally, to changing conceptions of authorship.

One of the most obvious points that emerge from this study is that written texts do not feature largely in early and classical portrayals of Homer, whereas they are central to the traditional formulation of the Homeric Question. This is not to say that written texts did not exist in archaic or classical times,[20] but simply that they did not initially play a central role in the conceptualisation of Homer. It is in the course of the fifth, fourth and, especially, the third centuries, that texts become more prominent. By the Hellenistic period, the question of what author's name should be written on the label of a papyrus roll becomes pressing; and the concept of authorship is used in order to retain or athetise particular lines. Thus, although to the modern reader the word 'Homer' immediately evokes the

[20] Cf. West (1998b) 98, who argues that in the sixth and fifth centuries written copies of the Homeric poems would have been in demand only with rhapsodes, their patrons and, increasingly, school teachers. See also Turner (1977), Thomas (1989) and Morgan (1999).

question of authenticity and the mode of composition of the poems; in the archaic and classical periods it represents, above all, a means of defining the relationship between the most Panhellenic poetry and a particular audience. I have so far stressed the differences between ancient and modern conceptions of Homer, yet it is also important, at the end of this book, to add some qualifications to the discontinuities I posit.

I have suggested that the modern conception of Homer owes more to Alexandrian representations of the poet than to earlier ones, in that from that period onwards the role of readers and textual critics becomes much more prominent. This claim may give the impression that archaic and classical representations of Homer lie on one side of an imaginary divide, whereas Hellenistic and modern ones join forces on the other side. In fact, the continuities between archaic, classical, Hellenistic and late-antique representations of Homer are remarkable: I hope that even my sporadic excursions into the *Lives of Homer*, Hellenistic and Roman art and other late sources may have suggested as much. Certainly, it would be rewarding to investigate how the Homer of the *Lives*, the blind beggar who travels and composes an inordinately vast number of poems, and the literate Homer of Hellenistic art, with rolls in his hands, coexist and interact. However, such a study would demand more space than can be devoted to it here. All that one can say within the limits of the present argument is that the multiplicity of early depictions of Homer facilitates the inclusion of later and rather different representations of the poet in an on-going tradition, without suggesting a clear-cut break.

As for the discontinuities between ancient and modern depictions of Homer, two points need to be made here. In the first place, there is no complete break between ancient and modern representations: most obviously, both focus on the figure of the authoritative ancient poet called Homer. This could be expressed in another way: any appropriation creates a certain amount of continuity. Secondly, the discontinuity between Hellenistic and modern conceptions of the poet is far greater than has so far been suggested. While some forms of textual criticism may represent a link, it is very obvious that the modern conception of the poet is deeply influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The analogy God/author vs world/work

has greatly influenced modern literary criticism: the good reader of the work, or the world, hopes to gain some insight into the will of the Creator.[21] One of the consequences of this approach is that, in the modern world, a good biography of an author tends to be seen as a tool for the interpretation of that author's work, in that it reveals the personality behind the creation. The ancient biographical tradition about Homer disappoints expectations of this kind: with its emphasis on invention, multiplicity, contradiction, and (re)creation, it does not aim at discovering the deepest and truest intentions of the author as a means of explaining his creation.

While the influence of the Judaeo-Christian tradition on the concept of authorship is pervasive, it is perhaps particularly obvious when it comes to Homer. A frequent statement, in the world of classics, is that 'Homer is the Bible of the Greeks.' At one level, this statement makes no sense: the Homeric poems and the Bible elicited very different responses both in antiquity and in the modern day. There are, however, at least two ways in which this platitude is quite illuminating. In the first place, it rightly stresses that, for the Greeks, the Homeric poems had great authority. Secondly, it shows that, for classicists working in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is easiest to describe that authority by suggesting an analogy with the Bible.

The influence of Jewish and Christian religion on modern approaches to Homer is even more specific than has so far been suggested. Scholars have recently devoted much attention to the parallels between Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* and Biblical exegesis: the influence of Eichhorn's criticism of the Old Testament, with its comparison of the Alexandrian recensions to the Masoretic text of the Pentateuch, has been well documented, as has Wolf's own influence on the Biblical scholar Leopold Zunz.[22] It would also be possible to investigate how Biblical scholarship continued to be an important model for classicists after Wolf, but this would be the subject of a different book. All that needs to be said here is that, at a period which was crucial to the definition of classics

[21] On the analogy between God and the Author see, for example, Burke (1998), who reviews previous influential discussions.

[22] Markner and Veltri (1999) focus on the relationship between Wolf's work and Biblical scholarship and offer an up-to-date bibliography.

as a discipline, the paradigm of Biblical scholarship was an important one. It is interesting, in this respect, that classicists in the wake of Wolf put authors at the heart of their enquiries. This is how, according to Momigliano, Schwartz and Wilamowitz understood the aims of classical scholarship: 'The natural task of philology is [. . .] to indicate what men consciously think. The objectiveness of the interpretative process guarantees that the scholar attributes to each writer or speaker only those ideas which are genuinely his own.'[23]

It is not difficult to see that, in the case of Homer, it is exceedingly difficult to attribute to him 'only those ideas which are genuinely his own'. It is even harder to imagine any sort of 'objectiveness' which would guarantee the success of such an attempt. The ancient biographical tradition does not allow scholars to identify a historical figure called Homer. As we have seen, Wilamowitz did try to reconstruct the life of Homer on the basis of the ancient *Vitae*;[24] but his attempts were already criticised by Jacoby, who rightly argued that they misrepresented the ancient biographical tradition by reducing it to a consistent, continuous narrative.[25] The Homeric poems themselves are not much more informative when it comes to identifying the figure of the author: the lack of autobiographical remarks has been discussed in the second chapter of this book. The rhapsodes also obstruct attempts at identifying individual contributions: as we have seen in chapter 1, they present themselves as performers of the work of Homer, even though ancient and modern critics sometimes suspect them of composing what they attribute to him. More generally, one can say that Homeric diction is highly traditional: for this reason, even late classical or Hellenistic poems have a rightful place within the *Homeric Hymns*.

Despite these forbidding difficulties, scholars have displayed a great interest in recovering the original contribution of a great individual called Homer. In order to do so, they have had to misrepresent or dismiss not only the ancient biographical tradition, but also the traditionality of early epic, and the wealth of different or 'wild' versions of the Homeric poems, versions which are attested from an early period and seem to decrease, rather than proliferate, with

[23] Momigliano (1979) 1008.
[24] Wilamowitz (1916b) 397.
[25] Jacoby (1933a).

the passing of time.[26] It is for this reason, perhaps, that Nietzsche denounces the 'violence' of Homeric scholarship: in the case of Homer, there seems to be a profound gulf between the ancient evidence and the uses to which it is sometimes put.[27]

In contemporary scholarship, the existence of the author Homer is becoming gradually less important for the interpretation of the poems: this is no doubt partly because author-based interpretations have met with considerable criticism in contemporary culture at large.[28] However, appeals to the author Homer are still quite common, especially in the field of textual criticism, where attempts to retrieve the 'original' text composed by Homer are the norm. In fact, a discrepancy between textual and interpretative scholarship can sometimes be detected within the work of a single scholar. Martin West opens his Introduction to his new edition of the *Iliad* by declaring that, although the poem contains material which was sung by generations of bards, in its written form it is the work of a single supreme poet.[29] In an article which explains the criteria he adopted for his edition, he adds that the task of the editor is that of offering a text as close as possible to that composed by the great poet. His position on the editing of the Homeric texts seems clear, but is in fact complicated by his understanding of the biographical tradition.[30] In an article entitled 'The invention of Homer' he argues that 'Homer' is not the name of a historical individual, but that of a fictional ancestor of the Homeridae.[31] Taken together, West's views about the name Homer and his assumptions concerning the composition of the *Iliad* suggest that, according to him, one thing we do know about the great poet who composed the *Iliad* is that he was not called Homer.[32]

It is not difficult to see why the figure of the poet Homer is particularly important for editors. Without appealing to the existence

[26] On the gradual decrease of textual variants and its significance for the history of the Homeric texts, see Bird (1994).

[27] 'In the case of Homer, numerous classicists think that *violence* achieves results. The classics speak to us when they feel like doing so; not when we do.' Translation by Arrowsmith (1963) 7, see also Arrowsmith (1973) 295. Originals in Nietzsche (1967–78).

[28] One only has to think about the impact of the 'death of the author' in contemporary criticism: Barthes (1977).

[29] West (1998a) v. [30] West (1998b). [31] West (1999).

[32] Martin West confirms to me that this is his position.

of an original author, it becomes difficult to conceptualise the criteria for editing a text. The role of the editor emerges in the act of choosing what to print, which transmitted version to prefer, how to correct errors and corruptions. As Gumbrecht points out, 'What guides an editor in these choices is, normally and appropriately, [. . .] his idea of what the intention of the respective text's author might have been.'[33] To be sure, there are alternatives to this way of conceptualising the role of the editor, but the author is still at the centre of editorial practices. As far as the *Iliad* is concerned, it is extremely difficult to define the role of the editor, precisely because it is impossible to discover, rather than invent, its author. West has been criticised for his belief in the existence of a single, unified, written text composed by one great poet; but alternative models to his edition also raise problems.

In reviewing West's edition, Nagy rightly stresses the multiformity of the text, and the impossibility of reconstructing a 'single' original text, even assuming that there ever was one. He writes: 'The evidence of textual multiformity precludes a uniform reconstruction, a "unitext" edition of Homer. Instead, the editor of Homer needs to keep coming back, I submit, to the facts of textual multiformity.'[34] After these persuasive observations, Nagy goes on to propose an alternative model for an edition of the *Iliad*, and this is where, I believe, the difficulties begin. He writes: 'I propose an alternative to the concept of a "unitext" edition of Homer. Instead, I advocate the concept of a multitext edition. [. . .] It should have a base text which is free of arbitrary judgements, such as the choosing of one variant over another on the basis of the editor's personal sense of what is right or wrong.'[35]

I can see at least three problems with his proposal. In the first place, it would be impossible to record all variants, including different spelling conventions and trivial mistakes, so the editor has to make at least some choices. Secondly, and more importantly, a multiform text of the kind described by Nagy never existed. The audiences who listened to rhapsodic recitations at the Panathenaea heard only one version of the poems at a time: they were not confronted with several equivalent variants. The same is true of

[33] Gumbrecht (1998) 240. [34] Nagy (2000). [35] Nagy (2000).

schoolboys to whom the Homeric texts were dictated. These ancient audiences heard one coherent version of Homer's poems, even though those poems displayed other variants in different contexts. My third reservation is that while a multitext which displays all recorded variants would be an excellent tool for research, it would hardly satisfy the general public: modern readers, like ancient ones, want to read Homer's *Iliad*, not make up their own text on the basis of collected variants.

This brief excursion into the criteria for editing texts shows, I hope, that the clash between ancient representations of Homer and modern conceptions of authorship is very keenly felt by the editors of the Homeric poems. On the one hand, they must take on board the archaic and classical evidence, with its many textual variants and its multiform images of Homer; on the other, they confront their readers' desire to read the great work of the best poet. The result cannot but be 'some kind of compromise'.[36] While the discrepancies between ancient and modern conceptions of Homer are great and create, as we have seen, some problems, it is also true that there are important continuities. Ancient and modern readers alike want to hear Homer's *Iliad*, not the particular remake of a rhapsode or an editor. In other words, the authority of Homer is keenly felt by both ancient and modern readers.

In the modern world, the authority of Homer is linked with keen attempts at recovering a credible image of that poet and at establishing exactly what he composed. In the archaic and classical periods, Homer's authority seems to have worked differently. As we have seen, ancient audiences did not try to discover, once and for all, who the real author of the Homeric poems was, but rather tailored new images of the poet to suit particular contexts or, alternatively, collected and listed several contradictory views without adjudicating between them. At the same time, the authority of this imaginary and multiform figure was real enough: rhapsodes were expected to perform his work, rather than improvise freely on a well-known story, and countless intellectuals appealed to the authority of Homer in order to establish their own. In the next and final section, I explore the authority which was attributed

[36] West (1998b) 95.

to Homer in antiquity, and compare it with that which he enjoys today.

Authority

I began this study by expressing a sense of surprise at the lasting authority of Homer among the Greeks. This authority, I have argued, was not transcendentally guaranteed: whatever else we may wish to make of Homer's invocation to the Muse, Hesiod already warns us that the Muses can choose to tell lies.[37] So, the truthfulness of the Homeric poems could always be questioned. Likewise, Homer's authority was not guaranteed by a coherent, reliable and universally accepted narrative about his life and achievements. One may well ask, therefore, what the sources of Homer's authority may be.

When confronted with questions of this kind, classicists sometimes react by claiming that Homer's authority simply derives from the superior quality of the Homeric poems and that, therefore, there are no meaningful questions to be asked about it. In the Introduction to *The Oldest Dead White European Males*, Knox, for example, makes the general point: 'The primacy of the Greeks in the canon of Western literature is neither an accident nor the result of a decision imposed by higher authority; it is simply a reflection of the intrinsic worth of the material, its sheer originality and brilliance.'[38] This type of explanation or, rather, reiteration of the authority of the Greek canon, does not take us very far. To quote Burkert one last time: 'The success of Homer among the Greeks [. . .] is not a necessary or natural consequence of either age or quality: age is liable to go out of fashion, and quality is always debatable.'[39]

If it cannot be assumed that the 'sheer originality and brilliance' of the Homeric poems was always, naturally, recognised, then it may be worth considering whether it was 'imposed by higher authority'.[40] With this expression Knox is referring, I think, to recent work devoted to exposing the relationship between political and economic power, the institutions of knowledge, and the canon

[37] *Theogony* 24–8. [38] Knox (1993) 21. [39] Burkert (1987) 43.
[40] Knox (1993) 21.

of Western literature.[41] Yet a simple appeal to political and economic power will not explain the success of the Homeric poems either. If we take the ancient representations of Homer seriously, then they may have an interesting story to tell about power; but a very different story from that told by some contemporary classicists.

Modern Homeric scholars and the ancient inventors of Homer present contrasting images of the poet's relationship to power: as we have seen, in contemporary scholarship Homer is the poet of kings and aristocrats, whereas in the ancient biographical tradition he is a poor wanderer who pleases powerless people, fishermen, shoemakers, old men in the gathering places of harbour towns. To be sure, not all modern readers see Homer as an aristocrat: for example, in *Los Olvidados*, Buñuel presents us with the image of a dispossessed, blind and morally repulsive bard. Images like Buñuel's, however, remain very far from the academic consensus: scholars tend to posit very close links between Homer and political authority.

Leaving aside non-academic portrayals, which are too rich and diverse to be introduced into the discussion at this stage, I begin with an influential academic view of Homer's links to political and economic power, and then compare it with ancient portrayals. The concluding remarks of Janko's hypothesis about the text and transmission of the *Iliad* read as follows: 'I suspect that the ideological support the poems could offer to traditional images of authority was a major reason why they were preserved, at exactly the time – the eighth century – when the weakly-rooted Dark Age monarchies were being successfully challenged by new aristocracies. It may not be chance that we still have shadowy knowledge of a King Hektor of Chios and a King Agamemnon of Aeolian Cyme: these were major centres of Homeric poetry. But all this is beyond proof.'[42] In order to explain why the Homeric poems 'were preserved' Janko appeals to economic and political authority: the Homeric poems supposedly offer ideological support to the monarchy, and their preservation may be linked to the existence of a Chian king called Hector, or a certain Agamemnon, king of Cyme.

[41] Some important articles that discuss these relationships are collected in Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Maley (1997).

[42] Janko (1992) 38.

I do not wish to focus here on the modern belief that the Homeric poems offer 'ideological support [. . .] to traditional images of authority', though I believe this claim could be challenged.[43] What I want to question, instead, is Janko's 'shadowy knowledge of a King Hektor of Chios and a King Agamemnon of Aeolian Cyme'. The sources for this knowledge are Strabo and Pausanias, who do not even mention Homer in connection with these kings.[44] To be sure, the fact that kings called Agamemnon and Hector are linked to places like Chios and Cyme strongly suggests that they played a role in some lost version of Homer's life, though we do not know what role it may have been: perhaps it was a negative or hostile one, like those ascribed to kings in the *Vita Herodotea* and the *Certamen*.[45] However that may be, stories about kings Agamemnon and Hector must derive from biographical readings of the Homeric poems, exactly as the view that the 'real' Phemius was a school teacher in Smyrna must do. All in all, I see no reason why the two sources on which Janko's claim is based should carry any more weight than the story about Phemius or, indeed, those concerning the hospitality of the shoemaker Tychius, another character modelled on the *Iliad*, and Cretheis' labour at the banks of the river Meles. The only reason why these reports find their way into the Introduction to a standard modern commentary, whereas the rest of the biographical tradition is dismissed, is that they confirm modern suppositions about the connection between Homeric poetry and political and economic authority.

The connections between the classical canon and institutions of political and economic influence have rightly been emphasised. What the example from Janko's Commentary seems to show is that, on occasion, such connections are forged by modern classicists rather than ancient Greeks. The ancient evidence does not in fact encourage us to associate Homer with political or economic power. Homer is repeatedly presented as a blind beggar whose appeals for help are usually turned down by kings. According to Heraclitus,

[43] For example, Haubold (2000) argues that in the *Iliad* Agamemnon, Hector and Achilles fail in their role as 'shepherds of the people'.

[44] In support of this statement, Janko quotes Carlier (1984) 449 and 463, whose discussion is based on Pausanias 7.4.9 (= *FGrHist* 392 F 1) and Strabo 13.1.3.

[45] *Vita Herodotea* 160–2, with apparatus criticus; *Certamen* 207–10.

Homer's interlocutors are children infested by lice. According to Plato, Homer is a poor traveller. According to the *Certamen*, he fails to meet with the approval of king Panedes. In the rare attested cases where powerful people are not hostile to Homer, they tend to meet him on their travels, that is, in a situation in which they are themselves temporarily disempowered. Lycurgus meets Homer when he is far away from Sparta; the report according to which Hipparchus 'brought the poems to Attica' likewise implies that he had to leave the city he ruled in order to find that treasure.[46] In short: when taken seriously, many ancient portrayals of Homer invite us to think about the authority of the dispossessed, the blind and the traveller.[47]

In a recent review, Adam Kirsch makes the following observations about poetry: 'Every poet begins as a provincial, dreaming of emigration to the city of the honoured dead. "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death", wrote Keats, and the ambiguity is moving; he wants to be remembered as one of them, but also actually walk and talk with them, like Dante with Virgil. To live on the fringes of literary society may, then, be an advantage to a poet's literary culture. He sees no reason not to converse directly with the authors he knows only from books, he does not need his passport stamped by London or New York. This is the freedom that allowed Keats, the Cockney poet, to be the most direct heir of Shakespeare; and the freedom that drove Derek Walcott, as a child on Saint Lucia, to envy a blind neighbour, thinking of "Homer and Milton in their owl-blind towers".'[48]

Stories about Homer's life are slightly different from the model envisaged by Kirsch: Homer does not simply travel from margin to centre. Rather, he is always linked to somewhere else as well as to 'here'. The Argives sacrifice to Homer in their own city, but they also send sacrifices to Chios; the Chians honour Homer 'although he is not a fellow-citizen'; the Athenians hear 'only Homer' at their most important city festival, but they also know that the poems were

[46] See *Hipparchus* 228b5–c1, quoted at p. 221.

[47] On the authority of the traveller and the outsider in early Greek epic and beyond, see also Hartog (1996).

[48] Kirsch (2000) 10.

brought to their city from elsewhere.[49] To be sure, this geographical indeterminacy, or omnipresence, makes the writing of a coherent, self-consistent and universally acceptable narrative of Homer's life impossible.[50] The ancient biographers who set out to write the *Lives of Homer* did not construct a straightforward progress, but rather tended to offer collections of mutually incompatible views. These views do not encourage or indeed enable the modern reader to discover 'the real Homer', but speak of his authority and appeal for different communities in space and time.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to turn to the opening quotation: 'Actually, Homer was not written by Homer but by another man of that name.' I doubt whether the author of this aphorism received full marks for it. Yet her/his comment points us to a number of common features in discussions of Homer and the Homeric poems. 'Homer was not written by Homer' testifies to the tendency to use the name of the author to refer to her/his work. While this tendency is widespread, the identification between author and work is particularly strong in the case of Homer. In the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, for example, the entry on 'Homer' consists of two sections: '*Iliad*' and '*Odyssey*'. No help at all can be found there in exploring the relationship between the name Homer and those two poems. Secondly, our student claims that 'Homer was not written by Homer,' thus emphasising the importance of written texts in the modern conception of the poet. Thirdly, there is a clear awareness of a discontinuity between ancient reports and modern scholarly views: 'Homer was not written by Homer.' Finally, however, and most importantly, the student reminds us of the continuing influence and evocative power of the biographical tradition: '. . . but by another man of that name'. At the end of all the twists and turns, the poet seems to be alive and well.

[49] *Certamen* 302–8; Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica* 1398b10–20; Lycurgus *In Leocr.* 102; [Plato] *Hipparch.* 228b

[50] For the difficulties encountered by immigrants, bilinguals, refugees in writing their autobiography, see Egan (1999), ch. 4. She also stresses the authority that these biographies derive from appealing simultaneously to different communities.